

TAYLOR (L.H.)

THE
MEDICAL SPECIALIST.

BY

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The Medical Specialist.*

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Gentlemen of the Lehigh Valley Medical Association:

My predecessor in this office, in his admirable address delivered at Paxinosa Inn one year ago, in his opening remarks made use of the following words: "The modern practice of medicine has developed three distinct classes of medical factors in the treatment of disease. The first and most important, with reference to the laity in general perhaps, is the family physician; the second the specialist in the several branches, who is the consultant and counsellor of the family physician; and third the trained nurse, whose function is to attend personally to the patient and strictly follow the treatment mapped out by the physician. Each class has its special functions, privileges and doubtless its necessity, but the functions of the first alone will concern us in the discussion to-day." And then those of us who had the pleasure of hearing his most excellent address remember how thoroughly and how well he discussed the first mentioned class. Taking his suggestion as a hint for his successor, it has seemed to me it might not be out of place to discuss the second mentioned class, and I have therefore taken "The Medical Specialist" as the subject of my remarks to-day.

The subject is a large one, and to discuss it thoroughly in all its bearings would require more time than can justly be allotted to it on the program of our summer meeting, but a consideration of some of its points may probably be of interest. There has much been written of late on the dangers of speci-

* President's Address, Eleventh Annual Meeting.



alism, and many and sharp are the tirades of those who see in the future the time rapidly approaching when the general practitioner will serve only as the distributor of patients to the horde of specialists standing ready to devour them. They picture to us in vivid colors the time in which each family in addition to its director-general, the family physician, will of necessity have its ophthalmologist, its otologist, its laryngologist, its lung doctor, its stomach doctor, its heart doctor, its gynecologist, its surgeon, its chiropodist, and so on to the end. If this be a true picture, then surely not in vain is the warning cry, for each man must be a millionaire before he be able to employ his doctors.

Not so bad however is the true state of the case, though there may be some ground of danger and some reason for the word of warning that comes from those who fear that our young men, attracted by the rumors of large fees of the specialist, and other fancied advantages of his mode of life, may be induced to neglect the more important and serious business of thorough preparation in general medicine and be tempted to launch forth at once as specialists, and, with one sided training only, may serve simply to bring our loved art into disrepute. In support of this view we are told of the numerous errors of those who see the basis of all the ills of life through the narrow limits of a speculum ; or of others who would cure consumption, chorea, epilepsy, insanity, and all the rest by cutting the ocular muscles. They tell us too of the narrow-mindedness of those who devote their energies to a single branch, and deprecate the tendency of such to treat all diseases from the standpoint of their own favored study.

In spite of these dangers, some real and some fancied, I would still say "Why not have specialists?" They are a necessity in the world's advancement and without them its progress would be but slow. While it must ever remain true that the burden of the world's work is done by the masses, it is nevertheless true that its brilliant advances have always

been the work of the individual. The burning of millions of tallow dips through the years lived by our ancestors did not develop the incandescent light, but the work of the specialist did. No one would be so foolish as to claim all the wonderful results attained in the electrical world, as coming from one man's efforts, but it is the work of the few, who, laying aside the general study and pleasures of life, have devoted themselves exclusively to special lines of investigation that have brought forth so much of value in this department and added so much to the general comfort and happiness of mankind.

An eloquent Brooklyn divine has recently said : "In all noblest directions the average excellence is dependent on the surpassing excellence which may be attained here and there by an individual. Since the days when Israel was personated in Moses, David, Isaiah ; when Athens was virtually one with Plato, Phidias, Eschylus ; when England meant Shakespeare, Cromwell, Newton ; when France was Jeanne D'Arc, Coligny, Descartes ; when Italy as Mr. Lowell says was covered by the hood of Dante, and Germany was in Weimar with Goethe, the impulse forward and upward has come largely from pre-eminent individuals. These individuals, one by one, have both marked the height of the tide and have been among the upraising attractions." These whom he mentions were not great in all directions, but because they were workers in special fields their names grow ever brighter with the flight of years.

The specialist is a necessity also from the limitation of time. The masses busily engaged in the labor of the day cannot find time for the development of new ideas, nor for the searching out of new inventions, nor for the discoveries of new truths of science. The world of knowledge and of art is all too large to be compassed within the narrow range of a lifetime. We no longer expect a lawyer to be equally versed in all the branches of his profession, nor blame him if

with his fund of general information, he devote the chief portion of his time to a special line of practice. We do not expect the historian to cover the whole of his realm, but are satisfied if along certain lines he gives us that which by taste, inclination or opportunity he is best able to bring forth. We no longer look for the teacher who is able to instruct our young men and women in every branch of science and be able to manage each with consummate ability, but are satisfied if he teach one or two branches and teach them well. If specialists then are a necessity in the world's general advancement so they are equally a necessity in the development of Medical Science which has made such rapid progress in recent years. He who attempts to keep abreast of it must be a thorough and accomplished specialist in all of its branches : and this is impossible.

They are a necessity further because the people want them and will pay for them. Only a few weeks ago a gentleman of excellent ability and attainments said in my hearing : "A patient came to see me recently, with an ovarian tumor and without the slightest suspicion of what ailed her. I diagnosed the growth and offered to operate whenever she was ready to have the operation done. I heard nothing more of her till I saw in a newspaper that she had gone to Philadelphia and had been operated upon by a specialist. We diagnose these troubles and the patients go off elsewhere for treatment." Now he was thoroughly qualified to perform this operation and had previously performed similar and more important ones, but the tendency of the times is for people to seek out those whom they suppose are specially prepared to treat their serious maladies.

Taking it for granted that the specialist is a necessity, what manner of man should he be? The young graduate in medicine who starts out at once as a specialist makes, I think, a serious mistake ; still more so does the student who decides before entering college what branch shall be his special de-

light in study and his future pleasure in practice. No man is ready to decide so delicate a question until he has made most thorough preparation in general medicine, and had some years of general practice to learn from experience the special bent or trend of his mind toward the particular branches in which he is to succeed. Our loved New England poet said to the pupils of Bowdoin college :

“ Study yourselves and most of all learn well
Wherein kind nature meant you to excel.
Not every blossom ripens into fruit ;
Minerva the inventress of the lute,
Flung it aside when she surveyed
Her face distorted in a fountain as she played ;
The unlucky Marsyas found it and his fate
Is one to make the strongest hesitate.”

Some who have become most eminent in certain lines have been, as it were, led into their work by force of circumstances. Favorable opportunity has often developed a love for special work, and ability in the same, that had hitherto been entirely unsuspected. I well remember the time when the able and accomplished Gynecologist,* who delivers the annual address before us to-day, was devoting a good share of his energy to the study of skin diseases with the view of becoming a dermatologist, and still later when I thought he would astonish the world by new developments in the study and treatment of nasal catarrh. It was not till after he had studied many branches here and there, and shown himself a skilful general practitioner and surgeon for several years, that he limited his work to the special branch that has made him so eminent, and developed that rare skill and judgment which makes his department in Johns Hopkins Hospital so favorably known throughout the world.

The best specialists of the day are those who have developed as such from general practice, and this I take it is the proper plan ; in medicine, one must be a general practitioner

* Prof. Howard A. Kelly, of Baltimore.

before he is fitted to be a special practitioner. I received some months ago a letter from a young man, not a physician, a perfect stranger to me asking what book I would recommend for study, to one who desires to become an oculist. I immediately wrote him that there is as yet no book published that properly enables one to become an oculist, without first taking a full course in study of the human body, and in the various departments of general medicine. In as kindly a manner as possible, I pointed out to him his mistake, which is the mistake of many others who vainly seek by short cuts and pleasant by-paths to attain to that which can only be secured by years of toil and honest labor.

Each physician as such is a specialist among the numerous workers in the world about him. He has by years of study prepared himself for different and more difficult work than that of the mass of his fellow men, and if at all inclined to be studious and progressive how natural it is that he should desire to know a little more of some one department than do his fellow practitioners. After he has spent years in preparation, served sometime in a hospital if possible and practiced general medicine some years to crystallize and fasten his theoretical knowledge, then may he lawfully launch forth as a specialist. Not however as some suppose that he may have an easier time or that he may gather a larger golden harvest, but because he honestly believes that he can do better service to humanity, and with greater satisfaction to himself, by limiting his sphere of usefulness to one or two branches instead of attempting to spread his energies over all. His life is not all that it is pictured. If true to his trust he must keep abreast with the general medical literature of the day in all of its advancements, for he is unable to manage one of the

"Slender strings
From which the melody or discord springs
When life's frail harp is touched with unseen hands,"

unless he know fairly well the mechanism of the whole of

that wonderful instrument. He must also keep well up with the literature of his specialty and he will naturally desire to make some advancement of his own, to do some original work rather than follow forever in the ruts made by his predecessors.

He of all men must be a thorough student, an untiring worker, a conscientious investigator ; and he will have many occasions to burn the midnight oil and find the days slipping away from him all too short for the accomplishment of his purpose. These are the men that have made the advancements in our science ; these the men that have created new departments that years ago were unheard of, and of which the most ardent enthusiast but little dreamed.

It is true that ovariotomy may have been introduced to the world by a general practitioner, but he never dreamed of the added years of human life that have been rendered possible by those, who as specialists, have advanced and perfected this work begun in so humble a way by a special genius, a brave and true spirit among the general practitioners of his day. The same may be said of many other discoveries in medicine and surgery, many of them in fact were accidental, and many brought forth from the labors of busy, overworked, conscientious general practitioners ; but the truth of the proposition remains, that the advancements of our science have, in the main, been possible only by the voluntary setting apart of certain men, who have elected to pursue what the world in general terms a very narrow and prescribed course of practice.

I should like to refer to some of the discoveries of value made by specialists, but the limits of my paper warn me that I must be brief. What do we not owe to the work of Lister ? I would not stand here to-day and claim that all we know of antiseptic and aseptic surgery is due to one man, but who of us will say that the carbolic spray of a dozen years ago, has not had a powerful influence in his own work, notwithstanding it has long since been abandoned for other and better

methods. Time fails me to speak of the work of Ferrier, of Wells, of Horsley, of Saenger, of Simpson, of Tait, of Arlt, of Graefe, of Jaegar, and a host of others who have sent us from over the ocean tokens of their devotion to labor and evidences of their untiring zeal in the advancement of our loved science. And that larger army in our own land, scattered throughout its length and breadth, men whose names are known wherever medicine is known, and who are daily showing to the world that so long as hands can labor, and brains can think, the secrets of nature will be wrested one by one and the unequal contest with fell disease will still go on.

How widely opens up the subject of the relation of the specialist to the general practitioner! And yet I cannot fully discuss it in this paper.

Our president a year ago called the former the "consultant and counsellor to the family physician." If all that he should be, he is certainly this and yet without the offensive manner that the term might imply, and without the slightest claim or thought of superiority over his fellow. The relation of the specialist to the general practitioner is a delicate one and will remain so until both are educated to a higher plane of knowledge and attain to that proper degree of gentlemanly courtesy that should characterize the dealings of all men. The true man, even though a specialist, will not with a shrug of the shoulders and a "why didn't you bring this patient to me sooner?" strive to cast odium upon his brother in general practice; nor will the latter, if the proper relation exist, be afraid to say candidly to his patient "now, while I often treat these diseases, Dr. B. across the way devotes his time especially to this branch, and I think you can do better with him," nor will he with open abuse or covert sneer jealously strive to keep from neighbor B. the work that he is so well fitted to perform. The specialist on the other hand should avoid trespassing on the domain of the family physician and under no circumstances should he treat cases of general disease in the

family to which he has been recommended by their chief advisor.

Every practioner of medicine should, at least, be so well versed in its various branches as to be able to know when danger threatens and when it is advisable to turn his patient over to some one more specially qualified to treat him than himself, nor should he wait till too late for the specialist to do justice to the case in hand. Within a very few weeks I have seen three patients with eyes blind from old iritic adhesions ; cases of iritis treated as cases of neuralgia, and simple inflamed eyes. I can count in my practice more than a dozen such that might have been saved if they had earlier had the proper treatment for iritis. Every practitioner should know that conjunctivitis alone does not cause neuralgia of so severe a type as to make his patient remain in a darkened room for weeks at a time, just as well as he should know that an enlarged abdomen may contain something else beside fluid that he can remove by tapping.

The objections to specialists come in the main from the narrow minded, and these objections can only be removed when the general and the special practitioner are by intelligence, by culture, by inbred manliness, prepared to labor with common interests and with the exercise of that true gentlemanly courtesy which is above and beyond all rules ; when each will give to the other the due share of credit which he deserves and each see in the other the supplement and co-adjutor of his own labors.

The increased demands of the times, the marvellous growth of medical science, the wishes of the people, all demand an educated medical profession and within its ranks, educated medical specialists. In estimating their value, we should not be guided by the mistakes, the foibles, the bickerings of the few ; but by the achievements and the possibilities of the best, and especially of those who turning aside from the chase after "The almighty Dollar," and loving science

for the sake of science, devote their thought, their strength, and their lives to its true advancement. The laborious, painstaking German, who spends years in laboratory work, following after one idea and forgetting almost the necessities of life in its quest, may serve in a measure as an example to some of us in this busy, pushing, practical age. We need more such men among us and we are constantly developing them.

I cannot close this rambling talk without a word of tribute to the general practitioner. In one respect he is to be envied. He comes in closer relation to the people; he shares their joys and their sorrows; and firm ties are often knit between patient and doctor which only the Grim Destroyer can sever. He is their friend and adviser; he carries their secrets and often hides their sins. These confidences and friendships the specialist cannot share. He may live nearer to science, but his brother practitioner lives nearer to the heart of the people. I think of all classes of men that claim our admiration for heroic devotion to duty, and for lives of self-sacrificing labor, the general practitioner known as the country doctor, stands pre-eminent.

I cannot describe him to you justly. It has been done and well done by others; but when I think of the long miles through mud or snow, through sunshine or storm, by day or by night, over hill and dale, with no opportunity to call the friendly counsel or aid of his fellow laborer, with none between himself and his conscience, called upon to act promptly and to bear all the obloquy of failure alone—when I think of this I feel like saying here is the man who above all others, claims my reverence and respect.

And think of that large army of them who in years gone by, without opportunity of becoming skilled in modern appliances and modern methods, yet nevertheless served their day and generation and served them well, and have gone to their reward!

We live in a different day, and if our opportunities are greater than theirs, then are our responsibilities proportionately greater; but each doing his whole duty in whatsoever field his lot may be cast, does that which entitles him to the reward of "well done" in the end.

"Faithful in few things

He wears the crown which faithful service brings!

None wears another's armor, each his own

Ours will be measured when our work is done."

